

Nurse Profile Louise Walker



*“A need for ‘hands on nursing’ led to my decision to become a registered practical nurse. And as an RPN, I am always available to my patients. It is exactly what I signed up for.” – Louise Walker*

Louise Walker is a Forensic Nurse Facilitator/Mental Health RPN at the Northeast Mental Health Centre in North Bay. It's a role she has held for the past year. It's also the culmination of an incredible career journey that has spanned the past 38 years, from her early days in mental health nursing to her current role.

When asked what she likes most about her present role, Louise says it's that she feels like she's in a position where she can make a difference. “I truly feel that in this role, I have a voice to advocate for patients and their families and that's very rewarding,” she says.

Louise is a lead nurse facilitator for RAI, Workload Measurement, E-documentation (flow sheets), Medication Reconciliation and other assigned tasks. She also participates in a number of committees (e.g. smoking cessation), where she represents her area and brings forward front line staff concerns, issues and/or requests. As a Forensic Nurse Facilitator, Louise also participates in opportunities to learn about upcoming changes in policies procedures and initiatives. Then, when an initiative is ready to be implemented, she helps facilitate training and dissemination of pertinent information to her colleagues. She also plays a key role supporting the Forensic Program's four units with staffing needs (e.g. replacing nurses due to staffing shortages or by supporting patient escorts to various appointments both directly and indirectly).

Reflecting on the career journey that has brought her to this place, Louise says...

“My journey is by no means exceptional, but it is mine to share. I was a single mother who was raising a son and caring for my dying mother. And in the middle of all that, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I firmly believe these life experiences culminated to help me be the RPN I am today. I am also an awesome dragon boat racer with my team, the “Warriors of Hope”, comprised of breast cancer survivors in North Bay. When I'm sitting in our racing boat, I close my eyes and I draw a parallel between my professional life, my experiences surviving breast cancer and my dragon boat racing. All three require some degree of leadership skills, you need to know when to participate, when to work independently and when to rely on your team. You need to learn team work and self-work.”

Louise has been a member of RPNAO since 2005 and has been proactive in accessing the association's resources to help deal with many challenges and opportunities. She says that having access to helpful and knowledgeable personnel for direction was important for gaining information and resources to help facilitate changes within her facility. "RPNAO is our voice at the CNO and in legislation," says Louise. "I am proud to be a member of RPNAO: My association!"

Louise graduated as a Nursing Assistant from the Sudbury Regional School of Nursing in 1973 at the age of 18. She then entered the halls of the Ontario Hospital/North Bay Psychiatric Hospital. It was her very first experience working with mentally ill patients and it was an eye opener for a new graduate. She then experienced nursing in other capacities, including an acute care hospital and a home for the aged. Louise and her son then moved to Ottawa to pursue rehabilitation nursing while working part time as an Adjuvant (Activation Techniques in Gerontology). Louise supported this move with a course in Activation Techniques in Gerontology. Eventually, she moved back to North Bay, where she says her heart is.

Upon returning to North Bay, she went back to working part time at her previous places of employment until securing a full time position with Home Care as the Intake Worker. This role evolved to Information, Community Resources and Intake Worker as the company became CCAC. Finally, she made her journey complete by returning to her roots at the Northeast Mental Health Centre (soon to amalgamate to become North Bay Regional Hospital). She says she plans to continue working as an RPN in the Mental Health unit until the ripe golden age of retirement.

*"As the role of the RPN evolves, we must always remember to be the advocate for the person and family in our care. As RPNS, we sit in the best seat in the house to provide optimum hands on care while working to effect change on a larger scale." – Louise Walker*